

# The Missile Problem

## Russia & U.S. Seek Arms Curb

If proof were needed of the new spirit of détente developing between the United States and the Soviet Union, it came last week in an announcement that the two nations had agreed to discussions on limiting their arms race in both offensive and defensive missiles. Never before in 20 years of disarmament discussions had the two sides come to grips so directly with an issue affecting the national security of both.

Even the manner in which the announcement was made was indicative of the atmosphere of private cordiality and cooperation developing between the two sides. At an impromptu news conference on Thursday, President Johnson felt free, without clearing it with the Kremlin, to announce that Soviet Premier Kosygin had sent him a letter expressing Soviet willingness to discuss this burgeoning problem.

The Kosygin letter was in response to a Jan. 27 letter from Mr. Johnson suggesting that measures be discussed to limit the missile arms race, which threatens to accelerate as a result of the Soviet move to deploy an antimissile defense system around Moscow and perhaps other Soviet cities.

In recent months the two sides have taken several steps toward what President Johnson has described as a "policy of peaceful engagement." Agreement on a Moscow-New York air route was reached. A new cultural exchange agreement was signed. An outer space treaty, banning "bombs in orbit" and military utilization of the moon and celestial bodies, was worked out. Near-agreement has been reached in bilateral discussions on a non-proliferation treaty to prevent the spread of atomic weapons.

The Johnson Administration, with a concerted political effort that privately impressed Soviet diplomats about the sincerity of U.S. intentions, has sought to overcome conservative political opposition and win Senate ratification of the three-year-old U.S.-Soviet consular treaty. Last week, with a shift in position of a few key Republicans, including

Senate Minority Leader Everett McKinley Dirksen, it appeared that the consular convention, the first bilateral treaty between the two nations, would be ratified by a decisive margin.

None of these steps, however, can compare with the potential significance of the missile discussions that will begin shortly in Moscow, with Ambassador Llewellyn E. Thompson representing the United States.

The missile discussions are an outgrowth of overtures by President Johnson, starting in his State of the Union message, for a mutual moratorium on deployment of defensive missile systems. While the Administration's emphasis was upon defensive missiles, it was realized from the start that if such a move were to provoke a favorable Soviet response, it also would have to deal with offensive missiles, in which the United States has a decided numerical advantage. In private exchanges in recent weeks, therefore, the United States has been emphasizing its desire for some measures to curb the race in both offensive and defensive missiles.

Just why the Soviets decided to respond favorably to the American overtures, after three years of indifference to U.S. proposals for a missile "freeze," is a subject of intense speculation among U.S. officials, for the answer may pretend the outcome of the talks. The Sino-Soviet split undoubtedly has been a major factor, for it has given the Soviet Union great political latitude within the Communist bloc in dealing with the West.

Fundamentally, however, the Soviet leaders, like their American counterparts, must be concerned about the economic and military consequences of becoming caught up in an arms race that would cost tens of billions of rubles and in the end result in no basic change in the present "balance of terror." In some ways the economic pressures are probably more acute on the Soviet leaders, for they would have to finance such an arms race out of an economy half as large as that of the United States, and at the same time try to satisfy "the rising expectations" of the Soviet people for consumer goods.